

A Rose by Any Other Name

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A Rose by Any Other Name

by [Dracoravebird](#)

Summary

It is said that, “When love is not madness, it is not love.” Perhaps that was why the Madgod was acting so out of sorts. Well, that, and the impending Greymarch. But in his mind, Haskill preferred to think that it was the former... and that this Khajiit mage may have some changes in store for the realm.

[* Opening quote by Playwright Pedro Calderón de la Barca.]

[Character Profile]

Chapter Summary

This is the profile of my OC. Normally, I'd direct you to a picture, on which is the profile, but I made a new batch of characters that I simply can't make pictures of (they're too unique and specific, and I suck at drawing people).

Name: Kiahni

Race: Khajiit (Ohmes-Raht)

Gender: Female

Hometown/ Base: Anvil, New Sheoth

Class/ Vocation: Illusionist

Primary Skills: One-Handed, Stealth, Conjuration, Alteration, Illusion, Restoration, Alchemy

Favored Shouts: None/ Not the Dragonborn

Birthsign/ Standing Stone: The Tower

Alignment: Chaotic Neutral

Appearance: Slender with pronounced curves. Suede-like skin. Has the coloration of a snowshoe cat, but with a black lower lip and black rosettes on her back. Bright blue eyes with feline pupils. Dark brown hair is done in a mohawk and swept to the side on top, but grown out in back and pulled into a braid. Long, slender tail.

Gear: Wears robes like the center of

(http://img14.deviantart.net/9539/i/2011/074/e/a/dragon_age_2_elf_costumes_by_joy_ang-d3bpwl6.jpg). Uses conjured weapons.

Backstory: Kiahni had a troubled childhood, having been born and raised in Leyawiin and raised in the slums. When she was a child, she would help support her family by performing magic tricks in the streets, as no one wanted to hire her parents for work and frequently accused them of drug use (which was a false accusation).

When she was a teenager, her parents disappeared. She followed various clues, and ended up discovering the secret of Leyawiin castle... and the remains of her parents. Outraged, she stole away in the dead of night, murdering both the count and countess, and the one in charge of cleaning up the dungeon. While an investigation was underway, she remained in the city to avoid suspicion. The guards came to her sometime later to inform her that her parents were deceased, and while crying, she commented that she knew, because people who disappeared in the city never came back. After talking to various residents, it was clear why the Count and Countess were murdered.

After some time alone in her ramshackle hut, Kiahni moved to the Imperial City. There, while performing tricks for passerby, she was accosted by Alessia Ottus, whom accused her of theft and called her a heathen, among other things. Alessia was found murdered – along with her family – in her house, surrounded by the books she had written. Due to being only sixteen at the time, as well as thin and waifish, Kiahni was not suspected.

She remained in the city for several years. A member of the Mages Guild took notice of her and

recruited her. Kiahni was a standing member until the age of twenty-five, when she learned of a strange door in the Niben Bay. Just before the Oblivion Crisis broke out, she set out to enter this door, and investigate the magic within.

Personality: For the most part, Kiahni is friendly, bubbly, inquisitive, and a little ADD. She's a brilliant mage, and a talented artist. She meshes her favorite hobby of drawing with her work, keeping a journal of her discoveries.

However, she has a darker side. People with racist attitudes remind her of the death of her parents, and can often set her off. While she prefers the profession of a mage, she can be an assassin when she so chooses, despite her refusal to join the Dark Brotherhood.

Curiosities

Chapter Summary

How else is a mage supposed to react when a strange portal suddenly appears? Besides do the sensible thing and not walk through it, because ignoring it obviously isn't an option?

When she overheard some guards in the Imperial City market speaking of the strange door, Kiahni was intrigued. More intrigued than she had been for a long while. She had long been losing interest in her various studies at the guild. There was nothing new she could learn that someone else hadn't gone over a baker's dozen ways. Perhaps this door would be something new.

Arriving on the outskirts of Bravil, she saw it. It was a three-faced doorway, hewn of stone, with a strange light emanating from it.

Kiahni swiftly cast a water-walking spell, making her way across the channel. Strangely, the unexplained island had one shore where it could be approached, consisting of an archway beneath and a small slope. Striding up, she saw another Khajiit, sitting in the fetal position on top of an oversized mushroom, chanting: "Go away. I'm not here." Standing before the door or gateway was a Bravil guard, sword drawn and at the ready.

It was enough to make Kiahni arch a brow. That, and the countless plant species on this little island. She didn't recognize any of them, which was saying much for an alchemist of her caliber. She sensed no illusions, nor any other form of magic besides raw power, such as ones associated with stones found in Ayleid ruins.

"Excuse me..."

The guard, obviously on-edge, whipped around to face her. "Stand back, citizen. This... door, isn't safe."

"Relax. I'm a member of the Mages Guild." Kiahni informed him. "What's going on?"

A relieved sigh left him, shoulders dropping. However, before he could tell her exactly what was going on, screaming came from within the door. It was followed by a Dunmer in tattered rags stumbling out, clutching his head with a panicked look, hair mussed.

"It's not right!" The Dunmer screamed. "Madness! Why?! WHY?!"

The guard tensed. "Sir—"

"Everything is wrong! It can't be done! Stay away from me!" He drew a dagger. "I won't go back! You can't make me go back! I'll kill you, first!"

"Stay back! This one's violent!"

It wasn't much of a fight. The guard easily blocked the Dunmer's clumsy blows and killed him with a single stab. The deranged man slumped to the ground, and the guard blanched, seeming tense and uneasy.

“Has that been happening every single time?” Kiahni questioned.

“Yes. Perfectly normal people go in there, and they come out like... like this.” The guard gestured to him. “So, I was posted here to warn people off.”

“Unworthy, unworthy, unworthy!” A voice cried out of nowhere, seeming to echo all around them along with distant thunder. “Useless mortal meat! Walking bag of dung!”

Kiahni glanced to the guard, whom did not seem to notice the voice, too busy dealing with the mess. So, she was hearing it. Some kind of spell or illusion.

“A nice effort, though. A shame he’s dead. Well, these things happen.”

Her brows furrowed upwards, the end of her tail flicking slowly.

“Bring me a champion! Rend the flesh of my foes! A mortal champion to wade through the entrails of my enemies!”

A champion. That was a curious turn of phrase. Kiahni took a step closer, but hesitated. She had never seen anything like this before. Not once.

“Really! Do come in! It’s lovely in the isles right now. Perfect time for a visit.”

Kiahni cleared her throat, and turned to the guard. “I feel I must investigate this matter on behalf of the Mages Guild. Unless your count would take issue?”

The guard shook his head. “No. By all means. If you think you can stop whatever this thing is doing, go ahead. Just be careful.”

She nodded to him, and ascended the short couple steps into the door. There was a brief light that made it difficult to see, but soon cleared and gave way to a small antechamber or parlor. There was a table and two chairs, one of which was occupied by a bald, middle-aged man in strange finery of black and red. Kiahni blinked in surprise, uncertain whether or not her eyes were playing tricks on her.

“Please. Sit.” He gestured to the empty chair.

After some hesitation, the Khajiit mage seated herself, crossing her legs and clasping her hands in her lap, silver nail-polish glinting in the low lighting.

“Now, what may I do for you? I imagine you’re here about the door?”

“Yes. I’ve heard some rather peculiar rumors. So, I came to investigate.” Kiahni informed him. “Who are you? What is this place?”

“I am Haskill. Chamberlain to the Lord Sheogorath. You approach the Shivering Isles. Through the door behind me lies the realm of Sheogorath, Prince of Madness, Lord of the Never-There. This is a doorway. An invitation.”

“An invitation from a Daedric Prince? To what end?” She questioned, puzzled.

“I do not know.” Haskill confessed with a slight shrug. “My lord seeks a mortal to be his champion. As for his intent... to attempt to fathom such a thing is foolish. His will is his own. His reality follows suit.”

“As is the prerogative of such beings.”

A slight smile crossed his features, for about two seconds. "Quite. Tell me, who are you? And why did you come here, besides curiosity?"

"I'm Kiahni. A standing member of the Arcane University. And I don't have many reasons, besides. That, and a voice booming outside about needing a champion, and then asking me to come in."

"You are here because you chose to enter. You were not summoned."

"Oh?"

"You may leave, if you wish. You'll be no worse for wear, for your brief time spent here. Or, you may continue, and if you prove worthy, my lord may find a use for you."

Several matters ran through her mind. She was dealing with a Daedric prince, and one of the most unpredictable at that. Warily, she weighed her options. It was a new realm to explore, and not many mages were able to first-handedly able to observe a given plain of Oblivion. It would be a first, though whether or not anyone decided to believe her was another matter. If anything, it would give her something to do.

"Fair enough." Kiahni nodded, and stood, straightening her robes. "I'll continue, then."

The man's face briefly lit up with a smile before he quickly composed himself and cleared his throat. "Fine. I'm sure my lord will be most pleased, assuming you ever manage to see him. You'll want to pass through the Gates of Madness – Mania and Dementia, respectively. And mind the Gatekeeper. He dislikes strangers to the realm."

Haskill stood, and exited the room, pulling the door closed behind him. When she tried to follow, hand on the cold iron doorknob, but it was locked. Kiahni jumped at the sound of dozens of fluttering wings. The walls melted into butterflies, flitting away into the surroundings to disappear. It left her standing on a stone altar of some kind, surrounded by pillars that lined the path leading onwards towards a town in the distance.

"What in Nirn...?" Kiahni trailed off, eyes wide with childish wonder.

Paving stones were cold and damp against her feet as she strode off, passing a puddle and a pair of strange, dead creatures that vaguely resembled frogs. The town she came to was rather small, squalid, and sat in the middle of a marshy area that was enclosed by a stone wall. With the sun setting, she thought little of finding the inn – it bore a sign above the door. The Bosmer woman who ran the place seemed out of sorts, but was amiable enough.

Seated at a table, Kiahni slid her journal from her bag. With no new or useful research, she had left her prior journal at the guild, in favor of starting a new one. She filled a few pages with descriptions, hypotheses, and sketches of both the town and the strange door she had passed through. Of course, she gave each page some time to let the ink could dry, to prevent smudging.

A couple people gave her strange looks, but no one addressed her. One particular Dunmer woman with fiery red hair glared holes in her, but the Khajiit paid it no mind. She had gotten worse looks from fellow mages, or guards. Or...

Kiahni felt her fingers tightened and quickly lifted her pen off the page. She forced such thoughts out of her mind, quickly distracting herself with attempting to mentally classify the various fungus species she had seen so far, humming a song to herself and forcing down the shaking in her hands.

Tomorrow, she would see about this Gatekeeper business.

Watching a party of well-outfitted, experienced adventurers get wiped out so easily was... unnerving. What information she gathered was not entirely helpful. Something about Relmyna Verenim's tears interfering with the Daedric binding spells, or some such. Tears would not be enough to harm such a creature, of that, Kiahni was certain.

So, she asked around a bit more. Her second inquest led to a hut in town. A home where a Nord huntsman lived. Reaching up, Kiahni clacked the iron knocker, wrinkling her nose briefly at how rust and a metallic fetor came off on her fingers. Her wait was brief, a tall and broad Norseman opening the door, garbed in fur armor and bow in hand.

"Apologies for bothering you, but I hear you want to kill the Gatekeeper."

"Ha! Up-front. I like that. And if you're asking about the Gatekeeper, you're new here." The Nord got a wild look in his eye, and smiled, stepping down his porch stairs.

She pulled his door closed for him and joined him in front of his home.

"I'm Jayred Ice-Veins. Do you ever wonder why things look better without their skin on? For instance, you can only really see the bones when you take them out. You can hear them better that way, too."

Kiahni arched a brow. "Such as bone chimes?"

"Aye, in a way. They call to me. I can hear them, on the other side of the wall. I want the Gatekeeper dead. I need him dead. And you need him dead, too."

"Sheldon suggested you had a plan. What is it?"

"The best way to kill something is with the bones of its kin. And there's a dead Gatekeeper in the Gardens of Flesh and Bone, nearby. You help me get the gates open, and I can make us some arrows."

"You may keep all the arrows, friend. I'm not much use with a bow. But I know magic. And I can easily charm a lock open." The Khajiit supplied.

"Good. Let's go. The gardens are this way." Jayred took the lead, walking off towards their destination.

Kiahni followed, walking alongside him down the streets of Passwall. However, something made her uneasy. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Your bones are singing. I've never heard bones sing before. Usually talking. Muttering. Screaming. Hissing, or growling. Never singing."

Curious, and mentally supposing that this man could hear magicka as opposed to actual bones, she glanced his way. "And what do they say?"

"Hard to tell."

The mage pouted, but let the matter go. "Well, let's get those bones and make some arrows, shall we?"

The Madgod and the Mage

Chapter Summary

Imagining Sheogorath's clothes as (<http://i.imgur.com/1x5JyVJ.jpg>) with the vanilla Oblivion shoulders, collar, and sleeves. Because leggings... just... Nope. Also, referenced jewelry is (<http://staticdelivery.nexusmods.com/mods/110/images/52266-1-1413158014.jpeg>) as the Charity of Madness and Rings of Lordship.

It took Kiahni longer to reach the city than she would like to admit. She had taken the long route, perturbed by the marshes of Dementia, and opting for the hills of Mania instead. She appreciated the choice, mentally speaking, of both this landscape and the Gate of Mania, as she had given the other key to Jayred so he too could pass through. Kiahni was dazzled by the brilliant colors around her, by the sweet smells of flowers and green mushroom trees, and the strange flora and fauna.

A few spells of speed had helped her catch up, allowing her to reach the city in only three days. Much to her surprise, the guards stationed at the gates appeared to be Golden Saints – a sort of Daedra she had only read about, but never seen. Their skimp armor left something to be desired, but she supposed being immortal had some wondrous perks to it. She approached the gates, marveling at the architecture.

“Halt, newcomer.” One of them ordered tersely. “What is your business in the city of New Sheoth?”

“Lord Sheogorath's chamberlain told me to come here once I managed to get out of Passwall. Something about your master wishing to see me.” Kiahni told her, treading carefully with her tone.

“Apologies, mortal. These are dangerous times, even in the Realm.” She bowed her head to the shorter woman while her counterpart signaled for the gates to open. “You may enter.”

“Which way to the palace?”

“The Palace District is directly north of both Bliss, the Mania district, and Crucible, the Dementia district. You'll be able to see it, easily.”

Kiahni uttered a quiet thanks, and passed through the gates, which closed behind her with a noisome boom. Bliss was no less colorful than the landscape before it. Bright banners, terracotta shingled roofs of various hues, lacquered doors with polished brass knobs... The citizens wore a rainbow of colors, all of soft materials such as cotton and silk, with polished buttons of metal, pearl, or abalone. Their finery had high collars, lace, puffed sleeves, and frilly cravats.

It was sheer curiosity that took Kiahni over to Crucible, just to see the contrast. She gagged as she was met with the stench of sewage as soon as she passed through the portal-like gates between the districts. The buildings were ramshackle, missing entire patches of siding and shingles. People were garbed in burlap, or tattered rags. Nearly all metal surfaces were rusted, from knockers to the twisted fences of wrought iron. She only walked two steps into the district before turning around and moving back to Bliss, then seeking out the palace.

She was expected, apparently, as the more heavily-armed palace guards only gave her a glance, both Golden Saints and Dark Seducers. Courtiers in grandiose finery with respect to either side of the

scenery were out and about, attending the day's duties. When Kiahni reached the front doors of the palace, she saw one was carved with pictures of flowers and butterflies with a blooming cherry tree. The other door was hewn with the images of brambles, wasps, and a great, dead oak. Beside the doors were a Golden Saint and Dark Seducer, respectively, whom opened the doors to her.

Of all the things Sheogorath had expected his champion to be, he was quite certain this wasn't it. Or, maybe she was exactly it. Who knew? Something about her drew his gaze to her in a way few mortals managed. Keen golden eyes followed the sway of her hips as her slender form came towards him. She had a unique coloration, for a Khajiit, stark white patterns against woodsy and chocolate skin. Traditional Khajiit robes.

For her part, Kiahni stared at him with some sense of surprise and awe. It was safe to assume the one on the throne was the Madgod – insane or no, he was a Daedric Prince and likely to have an ego. The throne itself was of stone, and behind it was an aged tree that had fungus of Mania on one side, and Dementia on the other. Sheogorath sat upon it with his back against one arm of the throne and one leg propped on the opposite one. When she approached, he shifted into a more "proper" position, both hands resting on his long, odd walking-cane.

His purple and gold tailcoat had two mismatched sleeves, one frilled and one ending in a shape resembling a serpent's mouth. The two sides of the flared collar were different, as were the tails. His waistcoat had polished buttons of a dark metal that had been jeweled with amber, the purple silk marked by gold pinstripes. Contrasting both of these garments was a solid yellow dress shirt, purple cravat and pocket kerchief, and solid purple breeches. His leather boots were black, the buckles gold.

Frankly, his attire was both charming and nearly painful to look at. His face, less so. He was handsome, as Kiahni would expect such a being to prefer. High cheekbones, chiseled nose, sharp chin, strong jaw, pointed and almost elven ears... His mouth was quirked into a roguish smirk, for now, his eyes glinting with mischief. They didn't make her think of a fellow Khajiit so much as a serpent or some eldritch creature she couldn't place. While not old in appearance, his hair was silvery grey, shaved short on the sides and slicked back on top, his beard short and trim.

Yes... very handsome.

"A new arrival!" Sheogorath chimed merrily, his voice possessing an almost outlandish lilt. "Shame about my Gatekeeper. I'm so happy, I could tear out your intestines and strangle ya with 'em!"

"If you truly wished to do that, you'd have done it by now." Kiahni surmised, though she bowed her head respectfully. "I apologize for any damages I may have cause."

"Oh, you'll be fixin it soon enough, lass." His tone grew dark for a moment before lightening to what could be considered normal. "Don't you worry about that. At least, not right now. I have something more important for you to do."

"As you like."

"So polite!"

"I doubt being rude to a Daedric Prince would get me very far."

"Hm. Maybe having a mage for a champion will work out after all." Sheogorath tapped a finger against his cane. "For now, we need to discuss your first task. Just a little errand I need doing."

Kiahni clasped her hands before her.

"You're going to Xedilian. One of my favorite spots in the isles! It's were I deal with... unwanted

visitors. Think of it as... a test of your capabilities.”

It was a test she passed with flying colors.

Of all the ruins she had been to, Xedilian fascinated her the most. Kiahni had spent most of the day sentencing nearly ten adventurers. She had taken thorough notes and, she wouldn't lie, there was some sense of power involved. Though, who died or who went mad was completely up to chance.

Sheogorath watched her. Not in person, of course, but looking into the eye of his staff allowed him such power. To see things in his mind's eye, much as other princes did with their own trinkets. Skilled mage though she was, Kiahni had been exhausted from the endeavor and set about healing wounds, using magic to mend her attire, a bath, and a meal. She was staying in Bliss, in the Choosy Beggar. It seemed like a perfectly sane choice for a perfectly sane person.

Only, she didn't feel quite so sane. Something was off about her. A little glimmer he could feel, but not enough to declare her blessed like everyone else in the realm. Strange... She acted so prim and proper. But her movements were fluid and quiet, and he had seen her actions in Xedilian for himself. A gem in the rough? He wanted to find out.

“Haskill!” Sheogorath suddenly snapped, scaring the living hell out of the juggler whom had been performing and making her drop her pins. “Send for my champion in the morn, after breakfast!”

“Yes, my lord.” Haskill replied in his usual monotone, though there was a slight arch of his brow.

It had been a restless night, despite herself. Kiahni had rose early, mind somewhat weary but body abuzz with energy. Such happened on occasion, fixed with a cup of tea and reviewing her notes. At current, she was studying the peculiar sword she had found in Xedilian.

There was an inscription on the hilt that read “Duskfang” after sunset and “Dawnfang” after sunrise. Not only did it change, but it seemed to grow more powerful as she used it, as if it were growing attuned to her. It was fascinating in the fact she had never seen anything like it before, and it warranted study. Having finished the spot in her journal she had made for it, she fanned the ink gently with her hand, pale fingers smudged with black.

The familiar sound of something summoning behind her made the mage tense, turning in her chair with a spell of lightning ready in hand. However, she quickly smothered the sparks in her palm, slumping in relief.

“Haskill. You startled me.”

“I see that.” Haskill replied dryly. “My lord has asked me to fetch you.”

“Oh. Another errand?” Kiahni carefully closed her journal and slid it into her satchel.

“I'm not certain. I didn't ask, and he didn't say. Such is the way of things. But considering he asked me to escort you to the palace after breakfast, I can only presume it isn't entirely urgent.”

Nodding, she walked with him out of the streets of Bliss. The sky was a vivid sapphire blue tone, a few puffy clouds in the distance. It was a pleasant day, not too warm or cool, a fine breeze blowing. She took a deep breath, relishing the scent of the various flowering trees strewn about the district.

“You seem to be in a good mood.” Haskill noted.

“I’ve... Well, I haven’t felt this content in a while. Change of scenery, new things to study... Granted, I will have to make brief trips back to Nirm to pay guild dues and such, but those trips won’t take long considering I can pay them in Bravil.”

He hummed softly, showing he was paying attention.

“You seem rather less gloomy, yourself.” Kiahni noted with a fond tone.

“I plan to attend midmorning tea with my wife after you meet with Lord Sheogorath.”

“You’re married?”

“Does it surprise you?” Haskill glanced at her from the corner of his eye.

“Hm? Oh. No. You’ve several qualities I admire in a man.” She gave a dismissive wave and a reassuring look. “You remember important things. You’re punctual, and say what you mean.”

“Most women don’t appreciate the latter.”

“Because they’re idiots. She’s a lucky woman to have you.”

The slightest lift of the corner of his mouth was the only sign of happiness he gave, at her remark. When they arrived, they were greeted politely by the guards, whom opened the doors for them. Sheogorath looked bored, though he had said before that boredom for him was a frightful thing to see, the Madgod sitting on his throne balancing his cane in the air on one finger with notable ease and skill. When Sheogorath saw her, however, he dropped his cane back into his hand and stood.

“You wished to see me, my lord?” Kiahni asked.

“I did! Or, I didn’t. Wishes don’t usually come true, so I doubt it was a wish.” Sheogorath said dismissively, striding down the dais to walk past her. “Come! There’s something to discuss. There’s always something to discuss, though, but I think this is more important. Of course, anything I say and do is important.”

A quiet chuckle left her, the Khajiit following after him.

Leading the way, Sheogorath took her to the tree behind his throne, in which was a strange doorway. It slid open at a single gesture from his hand. When they strode inside, Kiahni found the place was a garden of sorts, with traits of both Mania and Dementia, having glowing fungi of all sorts, and small fruiting plants being tended by gnarls.

A soft yelp escaped her when she tripped on a root, only for him to catch her by the hand.

“Distracted, lass?” Sheogorath snickered.

“Hard not to be.” Kiahni replied. “This is... incredible. What is this place?”

“This is my home away from place that aren’t my home. My personal quarters, gardens, etcetera.”

The hall gave way to a spacious parlor. Rather than a full room, there was a bridge with ivy railing and a large island on which the table and chairs rested. To either side were ponds filled with colorful fish, again mirroring the two halves. Tea, cheese, bread, and fruit had been set out on a tray.

“This is... unexpected.” Kiahni gave him a puzzled look, tail swaying slowly behind her.

“You act like that surprises you!” Sheogorath laughed. “But seeing as you’ve handled yourself at Xedilian, you’ve got the job! And since you’re now my champion, we have things to go over. Important things.”

“So you’ve said.”

“I like to know everyone in the court. As is my prerogative. That, and being a god doesn’t stop people from trying to assassinate me. Why, there was even one occasion when one of the heretics thought he could kill me by gouging out my eye with a silver spoon!”

Her brows furrowed upwards as he cackled a moment.

“Oh, it was fun seeing that one tumble down the mountain.” He wiped his eye absently and gestured for her to sit down as he took his own seat.

Kiahni glanced between him and the seat, and after brief hesitance, sat down. She crossed her legs, watching him fix a cup of tea and slide it towards her before fixing his own. In some way, Kiahni supposed she couldn’t blame him. Some nobles liked doing things for themselves.

“Anyways, I’d like to know more about you.” Sheogorath finally informed her.

She picked up the cup of tea, letting it warm her fingers. “That’s a bit vague. Just how much more?”

“Well, for starters, I never actually got your name. Haskill may have mentioned it, but if he did, I don’t recall.”

“Kiahni. My name is Kiahni.”

“Kiahni. Good name. Easy to remember.” Sheogorath picked up a slice of cheese, breaking off a small crumb and tossing it, watching the fish fight over it. “Where’re you from? Accent says Cyrodiil, though I could be wrong.”

“No. You’re correct.” She supplied, sipping at her tea. “I grew up in Cyrodiil. In a festering pit of a city called Leyawiin.”

“Well, well. You have a reason for avoiding Crucible after all! Was it that bad?”

Her upper lip twitched as she resisted the urge to sneer. “Considering it was full of racist fops with a pair of equally racist serial-killers as the count and countess, yes. I lived there until I was a teenager. Then, I moved to the Imperial City. Not that it was much better.”

Sheogorath watched as her fingers tightened around the cup. He felt it, then. That flicker inside her, fluttering between the two halves of madness.

“I’d prefer not to discuss it.” She finally said, setting the cup aside.

For a long moment, he simply watched her, and he tossed the wedge of cheese over his shoulder into the pond, where the fish all but swarmed it. Sheogorath glanced at them, absently wondering if he could make fish that swarmed dead bodies like that. If he could make fish that liked cheese, why not meat?

His gaze snapped back to her. “When’s the last time you laughed, lass?”

The question took her by surprise, the Khajiit blinking at him. “You heard me laugh earlier, when we were in the throne room.”

“No, no, no! I meant laughter. Actual laughter! Do you giggle? Cackle? Snort? Some people snort, and that’s fine.”

“I’ve... never paid particular attention to how I laugh, actually.” Kiahni felt her cheeks heat up, and was uncertain if the blush was noticeable.

“Ah, well, we’ll have time to work on that. Until then, I have something...” He patted his tailcoat pockets. “Somewhere...”

She bit the inside of her cheek to keep from snickering.

“Hah!” He pulled something from his pocket. “This amulet is your badge of office. The Charity of Madness! Guards will know you’re under my orders. It should offer some protection from spells, as well.”

The Khajiit’s eyes widened as she peered down at the shiny thing slid across the table to rest beside her. The amulet looked like a small skull, like that of a rodent or weasel. It and the chain were both crafted of refined, pale Madness Ore, while the eyes were dark, polished amber that looked like rubies when the light hit them just right. She could indeed feel warding magic upon it when she scooped it up in hand, and adorned her neck with it. Sheogorath watched, noting how the pendant rested just above her cleavage.

Some women would be insulted by such a thing. As for her, it was intentional. She had learned over time that if someone was sufficiently distracted, she would come out on top in a conversation. And she wasn’t entirely exposed, given her birth-sign and her skills in Alteration. Daedra or not, he was a man, and apparently, a man whom preferred women. Kiahni ignored this, straightening her hair and resting her braid over one shoulder rather than the collar of her robes.

“Is there something else you needed?” Kiahni questioned.

“I can’t just spend some time with the newest resident?” Sheogorath harrumphed. “Rude.”

“What? No! I enjoy spending time with you. For numerous reasons. I just figured that, if you needed a champion so badly, that there was some urgent business at hand.”

He looked her over, eyes seeming to glow in the dull lighting, not appearing convinced. “Name three.”

“What?”

“Name three reasons. Humor me.”

“For one, I’ve never met a Daedra before that hasn’t tried to murder me. Secondly, I can talk to you without looking like an idiot, considering some of my more outlandish arcane theories. Third... I find you diverting. In a good way. The kind of diverting that makes me happy to forget my work for a while.”

Sheogorath smirked. “Well, then. I suppose I can forgive you.”

The smile that came over her features, warm and fond, couldn’t be helped.

“Now, then. The important business of the day is this: As my champion, you need to be familiar with the court, and how things work. Can’t expect you to save the realm if you don’t understand it.”

“So, what, you want me to go meet your subordinates?”

“Something like that. The Duke of Mania, and the Duchess of Dementia. Two rulers, two halves, two places. Dual sides of the same coin.”

“I see.” Kiahni took up her tea again, taking a drink. “Can you tell me about them?”

“Syl. The Duchess of Dementia. Ever wary, ever worried. A prisoner in her own House, in a way. And a delightful conversationalist, really. Consider making an appointment. As for Thadon... The long-reigning Duke of Mania. A Master of Merriment, if you will. Or if you won't. I suspect it wouldn't matter to him.”

The duality of his speech made a quiet, scoff-like sound escape her, though it was more of a clipped laugh, considering her lifting mood. Kiahni stood, intending to take her leave, but paused when he caught her hand. His was surprisingly warm against her chilled fingers, the pad of his thumb brushing over her knuckles as he kissed the gloved back of her hand.

“Do be careful, lass. The isles can be dangerous this time of the era.” Sheogorath warned, and released her.

There was no hiding the surprise and the blush on her features. Not trusting her voice, she gave a stiff nod and turned away, seeing herself out with brisk, almost hurried steps. He was a Daedra. An immortal. Moreover, a Daedric Prince. He could have any woman. More likely than not, he was toying with her, but the notion didn't end the fluttering, squirming warmth it caused in her chest.

For a time, Sheogorath lingered in the parlor, thinking. He waited until she was gone before finally summoning his chamberlain.

“Yes, my lord?” Haskill sighed, appearing beside him.

“Haskill, what do you know of Kiahni?” Sheogorath inquired. “Tell me about what she said when she came to Passwall.”

“She stated she was a member of the Arcane University, and she had no reason for being here besides curiosity, though she has mentioned she enjoys studying the world around her. She was bored, and eager for new sights and subjects. Typical scholar, in that fact.”

“Hmph.” He stood, straightening his coat and taking up his cane. “I'm going on a jaunt.”

“As you like, my lord.”

The Court of Madness

Chapter Summary

Someone gets some news that would've been more helpful from the start.

Kiahni had quickly decided that she didn't like either courtly house. First, Syl's repeated threats to kill her for something she didn't do, should she not find those conspiring against her. Second, Thadon forcing her into felldew addiction. The repeated flirtations on top of it only made her despise the Bosmer even more, the sleazy little addict.

Despite using the Chalice of Reversal, Kiahni had spent the better part of three days huddled in her room at the Choosy Beggar, supping only on toast and tea, as anything else was readily rejected by her stomach. Hands shaking for that entire time, she was unable to even work on her notes or journal, though the Charity of Madness amulet had emitted a somewhat comforting aura as she rested.

In that span of time, she had managed to meet Haskill's wife Elaine, the Court Healer of the palace, whom had been sent to check in on her. She was an amiable woman of the same apparent age as her spouse, though through Daedric power was likely much older. She wore a fine, bustled dress of black and blue to mirror her husband's attire, showing her position, and had a pair of gold spectacles that sat low on the bridge of her nose – meant for reading, then.

When she was finally feeling better, she was able to attend court. Not only was she Sheogorath's champion, but she was a member of both houses. That meant thrice the duties. Kiahni now considered her restless need to stay busy a blessing. A mixed blessing.

Right now, stuck at one of Thadon's parties, she leaned towards calling it a curse. She had gone back to usual party behavior at the mandatory galas under Archmage Traven. That is, to say, she would stand in a corner with a small plate of snacks and watch. People were socializing, eating, drinking... there was a private area curtained off for guests wanting to indulge in some of the various drugs that had been reserved for the occasion.

When Thadon spotted her and approached her, she glanced around, mouth occupied by a fancy herb-wrapped cheese cube, the toothpick still in her hand. She saw no means of escape, much to her distress as she swallowed hard and set the plate aside on a passing servant's tray. The servant carrying the glasses of wine was on the other side of the ballroom. Well... fuck.

The mage swallowed hard, running her tongue along her teeth behind her lips to make sure she hadn't got anything caught in them. She pulled a piece of peppermint candy from her pocket and shoving it in her mouth to freshen her breath. Thadon reached her just as she crunched it between her teeth. The Bosmer took her hand, attempting to kiss the back of it, but she pulled her hand away before he could do so, earning a sneer from the Duke of Mania.

"May I have this dance, champion?" Thadon questioned, smiling in a syrupy, sleazy sort of way.

"Nope." She answered, punctuating the last syllable with a pop.

"Most would consider it an honor to dance with a duke."

“Then ask a member of the ‘most’ category.”

It wasn't unusual for Sheogorath to appear at galas held by either house. He rather enjoyed parties, and occasionally, would find some bonnie lass to dance with. However, when he strode into the House of Mania ballroom, there was only one figure whom caught his eye this evening. The Madgod had not expected to see Kiahni here – she seemed too stuck-up to be the party sort. Yet, there she was, in her customary robes, features accented by lighting and her eyes glittering like a pair of sapphires. True, she was no different than any other day, but Sheogorath was not one to waste an opportunity, handing his cane off to Haskill and striding over her way.

The chamberlain sighed where he walked more leisurely, arm linked with his wife's as he tucked the cane under the other arm.

“I can't tell if he's going to kill her or sleep with her.” Haskill muttered.

Elaine chuckled. “He likes her too much to either of those, dear.”

He arched a brow at her.

“Come now, you've seen how he looks at her.”

“Elaine, we serve the Daedric Prince of Madness for Oblivion's sake.”

“And what is love, if it isn't the oldest madness of all?”

Haskill blinked, and looked over at her. For her part, Elaine merely laughed, the pair moving to mingle with the courtiers of Mania.

“Lord, Duke, whatever you are... I am not interested. I don't care how many times you phrase it differently. And no, I will NOT take a dose of Greenmote to ‘lighten up.’” Kiahni ranted, dangerously close to lashing out at him, her tail frizzed and waving behind her.

“Well, if it isn't my champion!”

The sudden address from the familiar voice made the already tense woman jump slightly, but she relaxed when she saw it was, in fact, Sheogorath.

“What a pleasant surprise! I didn't think I'd see you at one of these parties.”

“Oh. Well... I'm used to mandatory fun.” Kiahni leered at Thadon.

Her expression softened when Sheogorath took her hand, kissing along her knuckles, at which Thadon gaped in shock, perhaps indignance. To her mind, it was simply courtly behavior, and... well, it seemed to fit Sheogorath better. It was honest, from him, much like everything else he did. Something she appreciated, really.

“Well, if you don't mind, I'm going to steal you away from the illustrious Duke.” Still holding her hand, Sheogorath led her away, skirting the edge of the open space being used for dancing.

“My hero.” Kiahni chuckled, walking with him, their arms linked. “Thanks for the save.”

“I'm surprised more people aren't tripping over themselves to dance with you, lass.”

“I didn't even dress up.”

“Beside the point.” Sheogorath said. “Or, maybe that is the point. You look lovely as it is. If you did

wear finery instead of functional, they might combust.”

She snorted, and then laughed. A genuine, legitimate laugh, bubbly and musical, save for the occasional wheeze. After a moment, she covered her mouth and stifled herself, all while he stared at her. First, in surprise. Then, in a wide, roguish grin.

“You should laugh more often, lass. It suits you.”

Warmth settled in her chest at the notion, her smile turning shy as her usual confidence withered a bit. It didn’t last as long as she would like, her gaze drifting to the main floor as the song end. He caught the longing look in her eye. The look a child gets when they see a candy, or the look a dog got when watching their master eat. Kiahni blinked when he took her hand again, her gaze returning to him. There was a look on his face she didn’t recognize. A soft look. A warm look.

“Shall we dance?” Sheogorath suggested. “As friends, of course.”

“I... Yes. Absolutely.” Kiahni agreed, face lighting up in a smile that showed off the dimples in her cheeks.

When the pair strode out onto the main floor, the courtiers of Mania gasped and murmured, moving off the floor in surprise. There were stares, and whispers. Sheogorath rarely took the floor, and never with someone of such importance in court. Never with someone that didn’t have his overt blessing. Kiahni focused on her dance partner, one of his hands holding hers while the other rested on her hip, and her free hand rested on his shoulder.

“I trust you know the steps, lass.” He said quietly, so only she heard.

“I know enough to improvise.” Kiahni stated, also quiet. “But I’d rather you take the lead.”

“Of course!” A clipped laugh left him, and the band began to play.

Much of the court stood in silent shock, and Haskill was among them, while Elaine smiled triumphantly. While unfamiliar with the dances of the Shivering Isles, Kiahni was able to integrate some moves from dances of Cyrodiil, enough to make it unique and elegant, despite the difference in height between them.

It was a fast song. A merry song. Still, Sheogorath managed to keep her from falling over or looking like she would, despite the sharp turns, followed by a spin. She was happy he wasn’t stepping on her toes like many she had danced with had in the past. After a bit of that, they separated, turning to face opposite of one another with arms raised some ways up and wrists crossed. There, they circled, briefly, until he tugged her back before him, turning her to face him.

He watched every reaction. Every emotion. A smile grew on her features. A wide, genuine, almost toothy smile. Her excitement just built up until they were taking turns leading each other about the ballroom, causing a second cacophony of murmurs. Not that either of them cared. By the time the dance ended, Kiahni found herself giggling like a schoolgirl, and following without hesitation as Sheogorath led her out of the ballroom, to the gardens.

“Well, if this is what it takes to see you smile, I’ll have to throw a few parties m’self.” Sheogorath laughed. “You act like you’ve never gotten to dance before!”

“I haven’t, actually.” Kiahni confessed, peering up at the beautiful, nebulous nighttime sky. “Most men consider me unapproachable. And the ones who did dance with me usually bruised my feet to Oblivion and back.”

“You? Unapproachable? I’ve no concept of the notion.”

“I know.” There was a beat of silence. “In all honesty, thank you. I appreciated that.”

“Think nothing of it, lass.”

“Anyways, do you need me for anything, tomorrow?”

“I don’t know. Do I? Will I? It’s hard to say since we’re in the now and not then. Why?”

“I was planning on killing some knights so I can dissect and study them. If it’s fine with you.”

“Of course it’s fine! You’re curbing the little pests on top of helping me sort out certain issues that we’re still not going to talk about.”

Kiahni pouted, looking up at him. “Sheo, please. I’m a learned young mage, and the more you actually tell me, the more we have a chance of stopping this... Greymarch, was it?”

While she raised a valid point, Sheogorath stared at her, debating the matter heavily at a speed too fast to contemplate. Crickets could be heard all around them, lightning bugs flickering in the dim, barely-there light from the windows and stars. Then, he heaved a sigh, nodding for her to follow. He led her away to the privacy of the parlor in his personal chambers, where they could not be heard.

“Daedra are the embodiment of change. Change and permanency. I’m no different, except in the ways that I am.” Sheogorath repeated from an earlier conversation, sitting across from her, and slumping into his chair.

“Yes. I get that part. But what is the Greymarch? And I’ve seen Daedric shrines, but never one to Jyggalag.” Kiahni said.

“Most forgot he exists. ... I wasn’t always like this, lass. He’s sane! So boringly sane!” He whined, head dropping back as he peered at her from the corner of his eye. “The other princes were afraid of him. Who knows why? Not me, that’s for certain.”

“So...?”

“So, they cursed him. Once every era, usually the end, Jyggalag regains his sanity and destroys the entire realm, and everything in it.”

Her eyes widened dramatically.

“I can’t do anything about it. I’m never here when Jyggalag walks. Because I’m him. And he’s me. Two halves, I suppose. It makes sense, if you don’t ponder it too hard.”

“And you’re just now considering stopping it? It’s magic. There’s always a loophole.”

Sheogorath laughed ruefully. “Oh, I love your spirit...”

Standing, the mage paced slowly along the bridge of the parlor.

“Kiahni, lass...”

She halted, her gaze snapping to him.

“You’re here because you’re going to be the new me.”

Kiahni gaped at him.

“In a sense. There are still numerous steps we need to take. Lots of things to do. The Greymarch hasn’t quite started, yet. But, in a sense, you’re my successor.”

“Like hell I am!” Her voice bordered close to a shout.

It made his brows arch upward, the Daedra lifting his head to gaze at her.

“You selfish prick! This entire time, I’ve been looking in the complete opposite direction of where I should’ve been looking! And you’re a Daedric Prince for fuck’s sake! How could you just give up?!”

“Lass,” his voice grew low and dangerous, “I suggest you watch your tone.”

“Watch my...?! Fuck that! Fuck you! I’ve been wasting time at fucking parties when I should’ve been working, you ass!” Kiahni rushed out of the room without warning, leaving him behind.

While she passed Haskill in the hall on her way up to the throne room, she barely noticed him, desperate to get back to her room at the Choosy Beggar. There was so much work to do. So many notes to take. She couldn’t think straight, much less wish the chamberlain a pleasant evening. When Haskill made it to the parlor, he saw a particularly dour-looking Madgod, one hand propping his head as the other rested on his cane, face twisted into an irritated, perhaps tired scowl.

“You know... that’s the first time a mortal’s ever yelled at me.” Sheogorath mused, almost to himself. “And here I thought she could handle the news.”

“She took it well enough, sire.” Haskill sighed, sitting in the now vacant chair. “Though, it could have been better, if you had discussed it to start with.”

“The nerve.” He scoffed. “And we were having such a wonderful time!”

“While I don’t wish to get your hopes up, sire, it is entirely possible that Kiahni could make a significant breakthrough. Even if she doesn’t succeed this time, it’s possible she could, in the future.”

“You act as though I’m going to keep her past this Greymarch.”

“You act as though you wish to live as her enemy for the rest of eternity.”

“Just...” Sheogorath sighed. “Just go, Haskill. I need to be alone with m’self.”

Haskill nodded, despite not appearing convinced, and saw himself out.

Pertinent Studies

Chapter Summary

A mage's work is never done. Neither is their research.

By the next morn, when Sheogorath sought to speak with her, Kiahni had departed, leaving him to stew in his thoughts for a while longer while she headed for the nearest active obelisk she could find.

She slaughtered a dozen knights with the sword she had simply decided to call “Dualfang” to simplify it rather than switching its name every time. The magic flowing through the blade only seemed to grow stronger at the lives she had snuffed out, if it could be called such. After, she ripped out their Hearts of Order, taking them back to her room at the Choosy Beggar and having Ma'zaddha, her reluctant assistant, fetch her some things from Cutter's. Grateful though he was for her sparing him and saving his life, he was still uneasy with the notion of her research.

Kiahni spent the rest of the day killing off the Heretic inhabitants of Fain so she had a safe place for her research. She sent Ma'zaddha off to find the Orc adventurer in Passwall, as she would need someone to guard the place while she was elsewhere. She did have to return to the city to get more supplies, including buying healing potions from Elaine. As soon as Kiahni set foot in the palace, Sheogorath was out of his throne and went to her.

“Where've you been?” He questioned. “Not here, certainly. I would've found you.”

“Please, I don't have time right now. Unless it's an emergency.” Kiahni muttered, turning to head to Elaine's study.

Sheogorath caught her by the arm. “Lass.”

The tone of his voice was not one she had heard. Nor merry or dark. More... skirting the edge of pleading. It was enough to make her halt and peer up at him, puzzled.

“I know the news was sudden, but there's no need to work yourself up in a tizzy. You're making my skin crawl.”

“No need? No need?! I just found out that the first friend I've had in the history of ever is going to lose his mind or die, and you think I should, what, relax?!”

He opened his mouth to speak, but she cut him off.

“There's too much to do! I've spent the whole day clearing out a safe area to conduct my research! Then, there's the matter of low funds, dwindling supplies, constantly needing to slaughter Knights of Order to get their hearts, and needing to buy services from the smiths for tools to—”

Sheogorath pressed a finger to her lips, silencing her. “First, I'm flattered, lass. Really. I am. Secondly, have you eaten, today?”

The question made her arch a brow, and she gently pushed his hand away. “No, and I don't have time. I can eat, later.”

“Or, you can eat, now.” He linked arms with her, leading her off to the dining hall. “Come along! My cooks have a fine selection of cheese at their disposal!”

Sighing heavily, she went with him, though the Khajiit could’ve easily pulled away, if she really wished. Out in the grand dining hall, the pair seated themselves, Sheogorath at the head of the table and Kiahni to his left. It didn’t take long before food was brought out from the kitchens. Food unlike the simple fare she was used to. An entire roast baliwog with vegetables, deviled scalon eggs, red kelp salad, a tray of sliced fine cheeses, tea made of gnarl bark and screaming maw, an alocasia fruit tarte, and fresh toast served with sides of butter, bone marrow, and withering moon jam.

It was a lot of food, but to Kiahni’s surprise, no one else showed up. It was just the two of them, once the food was served and the servants departed the room.

“I see you’re still serious about wanting to stop the Greymarch proper.” Sheogorath said, sounding oddly serious, himself.

“Yes, actually.” She muttered, fixing herself a plate but only poking at her food. “I found a suitable place to conduct my experiments. I have an assistant. Hopefully two, when I return to Fain.”

“And what makes you think you can do it?”

“Because unlike most mages, I don’t get distracted by secondary issues. I focus in my hypothesis, and the results I need. Nothing else matters.”

“A fair point, that...”

There was a beat of silence, followed by a sigh. “I’m not mad at you, if that’s what you’re wondering.”

Sheogorath gave her a puzzled look.

“I just... I’m not used to having friends, or having fun. Or anything like that. The idea that I just now have one and they might be taken away is... terrifying, really.”

“Perhaps I should’ve mentioned it sooner instead of later. But since we’re here now, perhaps we can make some real progress!”

She mustered a smile at his sudden renewal of confidence. Façade or no, it helped.

“Now, eat! You’re gonna need to be awake and spry if we’re gonna pull off the impossible!”

In some ways, he was starting to figure her out. Then again, figuring someone out never took Sheogorath very long. Madgod though he was, he was also notably brilliant – it would be shocking if he wasn’t.

He watched her through the eye of his staff when not otherwise occupied. She had made a trip to Nirn to pay guild dues and to retrieve some things, with which Ma'zaddha helped. Her place of research now had a working alchemy lab, and several doodads she used to study welkynd and varla stones. Almost all of her time was consumed with research. She was focused. Determined. Brilliant. Devious. All the markers of a proper mage, if he did say so, himself.

Today was no exception.

“Here are the water samples you wanted from the font.” Ma'zaddha said, handing her a knapsack filled with a series of glass vials. “The palace guards weren't too happy.”

“Thank you. And they know you're my assistant. They won't do anything.” Kiahni took the bag from him.

“What's all that for, anyways?” Drengak gro-Barrum, the adventurer whom had escaped the Gatekeeper's wrath, questioned where he sat in the small living-area left by the Heretics she had killed.

“Research.” She answered, setting the vials in a small wooden rack beside the main table.

“Sheogorath has tasked me with helping defend the realm. So I'm trying to figure out the weaknesses of the Knights of Order.”

“Those things? They're relentless. Nothing short of being dismembered hurts them!”

Ignoring him, she set out the Hearts of Order. She had found they were easily damaged by both amber and madness ore, often cracking even under feather-light touches while their polar opposites ended up completely unscathed. Kiahni supposed it was because madness was stronger than order, or because obsessive order was a form of madness. Honestly, she tried not to dig any deeper than this, knowing it would confuse her.

Off to the side, the assistant and guard both watched, bewildered looks on their faces. Kiahni set about distilling the peculiar crystals that flaked off madness ore when it was gathered. Much like raw ore, it was brittle, but to her shock, she had found out by accident that it dissolved. Madness in a liquid form, which she had dubbed it Madness Ichor. She was eager to find out what would happen if she dropped a Heart of Order in the bubbling sludge that had swirls of orange and green like lamp-oil on water. Another part of her wanted to see what would happen if someone drank it, but that could wait until after the Greymarch was dealt with.

“Still can't believe she beat the damn Gatekeeper.” Drengak muttered with a pout.

“Be glad she did and not you. Those poor sods at Xedilian...” Ma'zaddha shuddered. “I understand why our lord likes her so much.”

“I can hear you!” Kiahni chided, swirling a vial of distilled madness. “If you insist on talking, then talk about something useful. Or you can head off by yourselves. I don't need any help right now.”

The pair stared at her.

“And if you insist on fucking again, please do so quietly. I don't want to risk being startled and breaking something.”

After some outraged sputtering – they didn't think they had been THAT loud – the pair muttered to one another and left the room.

Kiahni set one Heart of Order on a small, metal stand usually meant for an alembic. Dropper of madness ichor in hand, she let a single drop fall onto it. There came a sizzling sound and a small wisp of smoke. Quickly, she summoned a sphere of light, moving closer. Rather than causing irreparable damage, she watched the drop of ichor slither deeper into the heart, stopping at its center. There, it stayed, glimmering faintly.

“Okay. Progress.” She quickly scribbled some notes down before grabbing a tablespoon. “Let's add some more.”

Adding more had just as interesting an effect. The ichor coalesced into a tight ball, before branching out with little veins. The surface of the heart began to flake away and turn to ash, settling on the table. What was left looked something like amber, but darker.

“Topaz? Maybe Tourmaline?”

Curious, she picked it up, examining it. In the other hand, she took up another heart. To her surprise, the pair began to ring. Softly at first, but more vigorously as she moved them closer together. Again, another interesting effect, but not what she needed or wanted. Growling flustered, she leaned on the table for a moment before turning and casting a spell at the floor. Right on cue, Haskill appeared before her in a whirl of dark mist.

“Yes? How can I help you?” He questioned, though in his usual monotone.

“Haskill, do you have any ideas as to how I could separate Jyggalag and Sheogorath?” Kiahni questioned. “Or, in the least, an idea where I should start looking?”

The query seemed to surprise him, his brows furrowing just slightly. Even so, he gathered his thoughts, and answered. “You could look around the village of Split. It rests on the border between Mania and Dementia, and there are two of each residents as such, respectively.”

“That’s an excellent idea! I’ll investigate imm—”

“Actually, I was on my way to see you. Lord Sheogorath has an urgent matter that requires your attention. Enough so that I would like to escort you there personally.”

“What, like... teleport?”

“If that is your term for it. I suppose.” He extended his arm to her.

Only a split second after linking arms with him, there came a gust of wind and a dizzying sensation that nearly knocked her off her feet. The chamberlain caught her by the shoulders, steadying her until she nodded, signaling that she was alright. Haskill led the way into the palace, but the throne was empty.

“I believe Lord Sheogorath retired to his rooms in case of unwanted audiences. You’ll likely find him in his parlor.”

“Thanks, Haskill. And thanks for the speedy trip.”

“Of course.” He replied, watching her depart into the Madgod’s rooms.

As she passed through the wide, tunnel-like halls, the many gnarl gardeners chirred in greeting, though they remained steadfast to her duties. Just like Haskill suspected, Sheogorath was in the parlor, feeding the numerous fish in the pond as he stood leaning on the railing.

“Haskill said you needed me.” Kiahni stood beside him, watching the fish swim about, long fins trailing like silk gowns.

“Yes. I presume you’ve seen the great torch that burns over the city?” Sheogorath informed her. “No? Because it doesn’t. It should, but it doesn’t. You’ll fix that!”

“How?”

“You’ll go to Cylarne, bring back the Flame of Agnon, and relight the torch! Oh. And take care with

my minions, there. In their eternal quest to please me, they're constantly fighting over Cylarne. It's tiresome. But really, it's divine. Divinely tiresome."

"Do I have enough authority to order them to cooperate?" Kiahni questioned.

"Absolutely! You're my champion, after all! You have more authority than both the Duke and Duchess combined! And everyone knows it. Or, everyone should." Sheogorath told her boastfully.

"I'd usually take care of this m'self, but I have my hands full. You up for it?"

"Of course. Just because I'm a mage doesn't mean I can't knock some heads together. I'll take care of it."

"I know. Because I asked nicely."

"Or maybe it's just because of your roguish charm."

He laughed. "Maybe. I'll see you when you get back. Run along, then. Scoot."

A Game of Opposites

Chapter Summary

Opposites attract! Or in this case, could cancel each other out...

Needless to say, Kiahni was unimpressed when she arrived at Cylarne. Golden Saints on one side, and Dark Seducers on the other, both quarrelling like children. Albeit well-armed children. Kiahni waited, arms crossed, and after some minutes, the leaders of either side approached her, glowering holes into one another.

Just as they opened their mouths to speak, she cut them off.

“The Greymarch is upon us, and THIS is how you behave?” Kiahni sneered, offering her own steely glare. “Truly Lord Sheogorath must be proud of his creations, wasting his precious time and resources like this.”

The pair sputtered, and naturally, the haughty Aureal objected first. “How dare you insult not only my kin, but the works of our lord and master!”

“I don’t want to hear it. Lord Sheogorath sent me to get you two idiots to do your damn jobs.”

“You have no such authority.” The Mazken hissed.

Kiahni arched a brow, and with a wave of her hand, summoned the Chamberlain to her side. The display of such a power, which no one had except Sheogorath himself, had the pair guffawing in surprise, and perhaps, unease.

“I’m sorry to bother you Haskill, but I wanted to double-check something.” The Khajiit folded her arms. “Lord Sheogorath gave me authority to command his troops, as his champion, yes?”

“He did.” Haskill drawled, arching a brow at the two commanders. “Will that be all, madam?”

“Yes. Thank you.”

With a nod, the Chamberlain vanished.

Kiahni leered at the two. “Now. We’re going to light the damn flame, so I can get it back to the torch. So help me...”

“We understand.” The Mazken commander bowed her head, as did the Aureal.

“Good. We—”

A pair of war-horns interrupted her. Kiahni whipped around in time to see arrows and raise her hand. The crystalline arrows bounced off her warding spell. The forces of Order had followed her.

Reaching behind her, she drew Dualfang where it was strapped to her back, and summoned a bound sword to her free hand.

“To me! Drive them back!”

“Our report, sir.” Grakendo Udico supplied as her partner handed Sheogorath a scroll.

“We successfully kept the forces of order from taking Cylarn.” Aurig Desha added. “Champion Kiahni was most helpful, and routed their forces.”

“Good! Good.” Smirking, Sheogorath handed the scroll off to Haskill. “Where is she, by the by?”

Udico glanced over her shoulder. “She is currently lighting the Great Torch. She stated she would report to you as soon as she was finished.”

“That’ll be all, then. Shoo.” He waved them away.

The pair saluted, taking their leave as the Madgod clasped his hands on the head of his cane, and rested his chin on his hands. Within only a few minutes, the Khajiit in question strode through the castle doors. Her clothes and hair were mussed, but she looked no worse for wear, besides being exceedingly tired.

“There was another attack by the Order Knights.” Kiahni announced.

“Yes. I know. My commanders gave report before you got here.” Sheogorath smirked. “I imagine you were a sight to see.”

“Uh... Thanks.” She tried to ignore the blush that crossed her cheeks, but couldn’t. She approached the throne to stand at the foot of the dais. “What now? The torch is lit. But I’m not certain how that helped.”

“It comes with runnin a kingdom, lass. Troops and armies? That’s only part of it. Hope can make or break a city. And what you did is give all my little charges a bit of hope. Or, you might’ve taken some away. It’s a double-edged sword, really, and some just get caught up underneath it.”

Kiahni pondered his answer, the tip of her tail flicking.

“My commanders also mentioned you were quite handy in a fight.” Sheogorath noted in a curious tone. “Where’d you learn to fight, lass?”

“I’m largely self-taught.” She sat down on the steps by his throne. “I watched the guards training, went to some arena matches. Practiced on bandits.”

He pondered this before giving a shrug and sitting back in his seat. “Go get some rest, lass. You look like you could use it. And remember to eat something!”

Kiahni mustered a soft little smile, standing with a nod. “I’ll see you later.”

She managed to get a little sleep. Not as much as she would like, but a little. Enough to function on as she continued her research. Though Kiahni visited the village of Split, there was little to be found or gained from the visit. She took thorough notes anyways, but she found little that could help her.

So, she returned her attention to what progress she had made. For the umpteenth time, she examined Dualfang for anything that could be useful. At first, she found nothing. But when she picked up the Heart of Order, and the Heart of Chaos she had made, the two crystals were not the only things to ring and tremble softly. Her gaze snapped down to the blade, and she saw that the lines etched into

the two blades and leading down to the stones inset in the hilt were glowing a pale, soft hue.

“What the...?” Kiahni questioned, quickly grabbing two alembic stands and setting the crystals in them.

Her two assistants were awoken in this early morning by the sound of Kiahni rummaging around in her things. The Orc and Khajiit men stepped out into the main study to see her triumphantly pull the Attenuator of Judgement from a set of drawers. She rushed back to the counter, quickly thwacking the object against the edge of the stone countertop. When it rang, the two hearts and the lines on the sword both glowed brilliantly.

Kiahni shoved the Attenuator and the hearts into her bag, and sheathed the sword. “I’m heading to New Sheoth! I’ll be back later!”

“Interesting. It’s been a while since I’ve seen a sword like this.” Cutter mused as she looked Dualfang over.

“What do you mean?” Kiahni questioned, journal and pen in hand. “What can you tell me?”

“This is a twinblade.”

“I figured that, considering—”

“No. That means that the two halves of the sword are supposed to be broken apart into two swords, usually by twisting the handle, like so. But it seems like this one requires a magical release to separate.”

Kiahni’s brows furrowed.

“See, here. This is why the handle is so thick.” Cutter pointed out.

“What kind of release does it need? A spell?”

“Perhaps, or it could belong to a specific person and react only to their aura. I can’t be sure.”

She hesitated a moment, her mind racing as she pulled the Madness Heart from her satchel. “Cutter, could you take out one of the two side-stones and replace it with a piece of this madness crystal?”

“Ah. You want to alter its magic, then. Yes, I think I can do that. Let me take some measurements.” She pulled a measure from her apron pocket.

“Could the other side-stone be replaced with order crystal?”

The question made Cutter pause and give her an odd look. “I... suppose so, though I don’t know anyone whom can work that material. You’ll need to ask around... or capture an Order Priest and interrogate them somehow.”

It was easier said than done. Kiahni had to summon a couple atronachs to help her herd an Order Priest away from his obelisk, and into a thicket of grasping ivy, the wines wrapping around him so securely that he couldn’t even make arcane gestures with his hands to accompany any spoken spells. She waited until he stopped struggling. Waited patiently.

When he did, she strode over to him, leering at him coolly. “You’re my third attempt. Let’s hope you’re more civil.”

“I’ll do nothing for you, wretch!” The Order Priest – an Altmer from his build and accent – cried in anger, seething, panting from trying to struggle free.

“It benefits me as much you, so shut up and listen carefully.” She drew her sword, showing it to him. “I wish to use this tool to separate our masters.”

The Altmer stilled, and she could feel his gaze on her.

“I need to replace this stone,” she pointed to the remaining side-stone, “with a piece of order crystal.”

“What... What you suggest is blaspheme!” He cried, though he didn’t sound convinced.

“Then by all means, give me a better fuckin hypothesis!”

He shuddered, but said nothing.

“Then I suggest you help me.”

Accession

Chapter Summary

Betraying a Daedra, or upsetting his Champion... Which is worse?

Progress was significant. Far more than she had, before. The only issue for Kiahni was that she had yet to be able to really test the sword. She could separate the two sides, now, but using them accurately was a challenge in itself. She had managed to stab a heretic in the chest and separate his body from his soul – and she presumed that it caused this because he didn't have a dual nature like Sheogorath and Jyggalag – but it still wasn't enough progress to call it a success.

Her work was interrupted when Haskill came to retrieve her. He promptly led her down to Sheogorath's quarters, to his parlor, where he stood by the railing, staring down at the fish. The steward departed just as quickly as they arrived, leaving the two in private. Concern came over Kiahni. The Daedric Prince had a brooding sort of look on his face, something she was unaccustomed to seeing despite having been here for a few weeks by now.

"Are you alright?" Kiahni asked, voice soft as she gently but briefly rested a hand on his arm.

"Mm? I'm fine as a fiddle, lass!" Sheogorath flashed her a smirk, but it was soon replaced by a sneer. "And, yet, I'm not. I'm angry! I've been betrayed! By one of my own! I'm not used to that sort of thing happenin'."

Dread washed over her, cold and icy down her spine like winter rain off the coast. "Tell me what you need. I'll handle it."

"I know." He straightened, gazing at her. "I've learned Thadon has been a busy little duke. Acting as a spy. No one would suspect him, the addled Duke of Mania, of course. Not even Syl, the most paranoid person in the isles! Well, besides m'self."

Something hot and sticky crawled through her chest. A familiar feeling that she tried but failed to ignore. Rage. Seething, snarling rage, snapping its jaws and thirsty for blood.

Sheogorath cupped her face in his hand, the pad of his thumb brushing across her lower lip. "Go speak to Dervenin at the Sacellum Arden-Sul. He'll tell you what you need to do."

The gesture made her cheeks feel warm, one hand rising to rest upon his wrist. A quiet purr rolled in her throat, her voice capable of such a sound despite her breed. His gaze was firmly glued to her as she turned her head, kissing a gloved palm.

"I'm startin to think we could be more than friends." Sheogorath supplied, eyes almost glowing in the dim lighting around them.

"I'm startin to think I like that idea." Kiahni offered quietly with a purr. "I'll take care of Thadon."

"See that you come back in one piece, lass."

Sneaking her way into the greenmote silo, take some, and kill the duke with an overdose thanks to slipping more into his food, and wine. That dinner party had ended on a rather... interesting note. While pretending to render aid, she managed to collect some of Thadon's blood on a kerchief for the Ritual of Mania. She had to become the Duchess of Mania to keep the kingdom in-tact, and honestly, if it was anyone besides Sheogorath asking her, she may have refused.

She was proclaimed Duchess in the Sacellum, and from the look on his face, Sheogorath couldn't be more pleased with the outcome, smirking triumphantly.

"You've done it! The ritual is complete, and you survived! A shame about Thadon, but it's how he would've wanted to go." Sheogorath shrugged, one hand on his hip and the other on his cane. "Now, onto other—"

The slam of a door cut him off, followed by Syl marching up the stairs, flanked by her guards. "Wait! I must speak! The ritual must not be completed!"

"Syl! You dare interrupt me?!" He sounded more surprised than angry. "Only I interrupt me! Like just now! I'm speaking with my Champion. We'll talk later. When is later? Not now, I'm sure of that."

She leered at him venomously, and refused to budge on the matter.

"Guards, I think Syl forgot how to use the door. Kindly show her the way out," his tone darkened, as did his expression, which grew cold, "before I forget myself."

Syl stepped closer. "You! You've done this! You and that... that harlot of yours!"

Sheogorath reached out with his free hand and pushed Kiahni behind himself. "Hold your tongue little duchess... before I tear it from your mouth."

"Replacing Thadon with this outsider! This is how it ends! Can't you see that!"

"Thadon's the one who set this in motion. Did you know he was spying for the enemy, or did you decide to overlook it while he warmed your bed?"

The Bosmer woman sputtered in shock at the accusation.

"You still hold your office. For now. I suggest you see to your duties."

"Lies! You're going to destroy us all! And you're a fool if you think I'll let it happen!"

"Fool? Visionary! Change is in the air, Syl. Breathe it deep. Bottle it up and save some for later." Sheogorath suggested, expression relaxed but eyes watching her every over closely.

"Order stands at our door. They've taken the fringe. Do you know? Do you even care?! And you speak of 'Change!'" She spat, temper rising.

Even so, Sheogorath tried to reason with her, after a fashion. "Change is the lifeblood of the Isles. It'll move mountains! It'll mount movements!"

"No. No, I can't do this. I won't follow you while you murder my fellows, and lead us headlong into destruction."

"Then go, Syl. Go back to your quarters. Before I send you back in pieces."

"Yes. That's what I'll do. I'll go. But not into your trap." The Bosmer woman turned abruptly,

walking halfway to the door before glaring at them over her shoulder. “The enemy of my enemy... This isn’t over, Madgod! I give myself to Jyggalag as a Priest of Order!”

The guards drew their weapons.

“No!” Sheogorath ordered sharply. “Let her go.”

Kiahni bistled, and quickly summoned a pair of storm atronachs, one in front of either door. The Madgod tuned to her with a surprised look, perhaps even offended at what she was about to go.

“She knows secrets of this kingdom. Knows too much.” Kiahni stepped out from behind him with a leer. “Letting her go with the Greymarch nearly upon us is a risk we cannot take.”

“Lass, I suggest—”

“Sheo, let me do my job.”

His brows furrowed sharply, but his angered expression softened when he saw the pleading, determined look in her eyes.

“I’m so close to finding a solution. I won’t risk that, or you. Not even by your orders.”

Before he could get another word in, Kiahni turned and threw a powerful storm-spell Syl’s way, impaling her through the heart and smiting her with lightning. She fell to the ground in a lifeless heap, a plume of smoke rising from her parted lips. The guards glanced at one another, confused as to what they should do. For his part, Sheogorath simply rubbed his brow, trying to figure out what to do.

“I can suggest two people to fill either seat.” Kiahni offered quietly, but without regret.

“It’s for the best, I suppose.” He sighed heavily, but nodded. “Everyone out! I need to speak with my Champion for a moment.”

They obeyed, but with clear reluctance, filing out of the sacellum. Kiahni waited patiently, expecting to be scolded or reprimanded. However, no such thing came. Instead, Sheogorath watched her for a moment, his glimmering gold eyes searching her expression or gaze for something she couldn’t place. After a moment, he sat down on the altar.

“There was a time I considered the Duke and Duchess friends of mine.” Sheogorath sighed, resting his hands on his cane. “Now, both betrayed me, and both’re dead! My, how things... change.”

Kiahni frowned, and sighed, gently cupping his face in her hands and tilting his head to look up at her. “Sheo, I’m sorry. I really am. But I can’t risk anyone finding anything out about my work, or what we’re doing. It’s risky enough when I share things with you. I don’t know how much the other half of you is aware of.”

“I know, lass. You did well!” He reassured her. “You did your duty.”

She slid her arms around him, and after a moment, he returned the embrace, and kissed her cheek.

Scorned

Chapter Summary

AN: Bed referenced is

(<https://i.pining.com/736x/d1/db/ca/d1dbcaf26d538f1ec686b4cef73245ae.jpg>), but with the central sculpture being Sheogorath, and the one to either side being a Golden Saint and Dark Seducer. Also, with four posts and a silk canopy/ curtains.

Kiahni had little warning. A hand rested on her shoulder, and she registered it was the wrong hand for that side. Then, pain. It skittered up her back and along her ribs. Her breath left her in a low wheeze, legs going weak as she felt the dagger pierce her over, and over. Five times. Wavering, she slid to her knees, not registering the pain of the hard impact.

“Lord Sheogorath is mine, and no one else’s.” Relmyna hissed as the Khajiit fell onto her side. “Did you think I’d sit idly by while you try to steal him away, harlot?”

Kiahni groaned, trying to muster a spell of healing, but the poison now coursing through her didn’t allow it. Footfalls moved away from her.

“You corrupt my apprentice, kill my son, and then steal my fiancé. You deserve such a death, you whore!”

She heard the Gates of Demetia slam closed. Blood... she could taste blood bubbling in her throat, breathing getting harder to do. Focusing as best she could, Kiahni mustered enough magic for a single spell. There was a whirl of mist, the chamberlain appearing only a couple yards away.

“Yes, w—” Haskill cut himself off with an alarmed gasp and was at her side in an instant. “Kiahni!”

“R-Relmyna...” The mage rasped, crimson trailing from the corner of her mouth. “She... did this...”

The Breton called a spell of healing to his hand. While not as gifted as his wife with Restoration, he could staunch the bleeding, at least.

“The latest reports, my lord.” Aurig Desha handed Sheogorath a scroll, which he set aside on the arm of his throne. “The forces of Order were driven back successfully, and much of Passwall remains intact.”

Grakendo Udico nodded. “Champion Kiahni’s research and tactics have proven invaluable, my lord. We’ve destroyed several obelisks all across the isles.”

“Good!” Sheogorath grinned. “Keep pressing the assault and stay on your toes. We’ll need to hold the advantage as long as possible! Now, as for—”

Haskill appearing out of nowhere was nothing strange. The chamberlain suddenly appearing in the center of the throne room with his arms full of bleeding, unconscious Khajiit was another story. Sheogorath fell silent in an instant and shot out of his seat, cane clattering to the floor. Haskill set the woman down, shouting for his wife. Elaine came running, skirts in her hands. The Madgod rushed

closer, kneeling beside the woman and taking up her hand. She was cool to the touch, unresponsive, lost to the waking world.

“What happened?!” He demanded.

“She claimed Relmyna attacked her.” Haskill informed him. “The shock of transport must have rendered her unconscious.”

Ignoring them, Elaine pressed her hand to the Khajiit’s back, along the wounds. They were deep, enough to chip bones and cut into organs.

“Haskill, go get some restorative potions.” She finally told her husband. “This will need more energy than I have on my own.”

With a nod, the chamberlain disappeared to their rooms.

The throne room fell so utterly still that the Font of Madness sounded like a roaring waterfall. Desha and Udico gave one another uneasy looks, while courtiers whom had emerged to investigate the commotion watched in shocked, fearful silence. Slowly, Sheogorath stood, and turned to the Aurig and Grakendo.

“Bring Verenim here. Immediately.” He growled, voice low and seething, the air around him practically humming with tension and raw power. “Don’t tell her why. Understand?!”

The pair saluted and briskly left the palace.

Sheogorath then gazed down at Elaine and Kiahni. “When you can, take her to my chambers, to my bed, where she’ll be safe.”

“Yes, sir.” Elaine nodded, but didn’t look up from her task. “I will.”

Five times. Kiahni had been stabbed FIVE times, in the middle of her back. Cowardly, but smart. Relmyna had known the Khajiit was the more skilled of the two when it came to combat.

Sheogorath was beyond seething. The wind outside was howling like a hurricane, sequestering people indoors. Tides had risen alarmingly, and waves crashed on the shore with an earthshattering force. It was clear from weather alone that the Madgod was more than displeased, to say nothing of how he was glaring holes into the doors of the palace, waiting for the Dunmer’s arrival.

Finally, Relmyna – flanked by Aurig Desha and Grakendo Udico – entered the palace. Most of the Mania courtiers retreated to their house, not wanting to see what would happen since it would disrupt what happiness they had. However, many of the Dementia courtiers were in attendance, eager to see just what became of Verenim, since none of them liked her. Of course, believing she did nothing wrong, Relmyna was not uneasy in the slightest, until she saw the look on Sheogorath’s face.

“I presume you know why you’re here.” He sneered, glowering at her.

“I’m not entirely certain what you mean, my lord.” She replied, hands clasped before her. “I rebuilt the Gatekeeper, as you ordered.”

A chuckle rolled in his throat. “My, my, my... You really have no idea what you’ve gotten yourself into.”

Murmurs coursed through the courtiers as the Madgod stood.

“Not only did you have the gall to attack my champion, but you’re so shameless that you think nothing’ll come from it. That’s... Why, that’s insane!” Sheogorath cackled for a moment before darkening again. “It’s a shame you outlived your usefulness... and my patience.”

Desha and Udico seized the Dunmer by either arm.

Alarmed, Relmyna glanced between them, and then stared up at the Daedric Prince. “My lord, surely you don’t—”

“SILENCE!!!” The command echoed through the throne room like the boom of thunder, followed by brief quiet. “I have a very special penance planned for you... Take Verenim to her new home. Before I forget m’self.”

The Aurig and Grakendo saluted, and didn’t hesitate as they dragged the woman away, kicking and screaming.

“Haskill...” Sheogorath dragged a hand down his face. “Meet me in the parlor. We need to discuss something.”

Warmth. Softness. It wasn’t what Kiahni expected to wake up to. Well, she didn’t think she would wake up at all, honestly. But for now, despite the lingering aches and pains, she was comfortable, lying on her side with her head supported by a pillow. Silken covers were pulled over her, the woman garbed in her underwear and a silk, button-up nightgown. The scent around her was... familiar. Ginger, sandalwood, and earth, with a hint of cologne.

A quiet moan left her as she cracked an eye. Briefly, her vision was blurred, but in the fluttering light of a nearby fireplace, she saw a familiar figure as he sat on the edge of the bed, making the mattress dip slightly. Warm fingers brushed her bangs out of her face.

“You there, lass?” Sheogorath questioned, voice quiet but bearing its usual energy. “It’d be a shame if you weren’t. I’ve been waitin for hours.”

“Sheo? Where am I?” Kiahni questioned tiredly, eye sliding closed as she felt his hand rest on her head.

“I had you brought to my rooms, lass. You’ll be safe down here.”

She purred, but the sound was weak, and quiet.

“How’re you feelin?”

“I’m okay. Sore. But okay.”

“Good. Elaine said there’d be no permanent damage. And don’t worry about Relmyna. I had her... taken care of.”

“I know.” Kiahni mustered a smile.

There was a moment where he sat in silence beside her, simply looking at her. His coat had been removed, and a couple strands of his bangs hung in front of his brow, the sleeves of his shirt rolled up to his elbows. It seemed odd, since he didn’t exactly look comfortable.

Quietly, she opened her arms to him. “C’mere.”

He hesitated, but only briefly, setting his cane aside and sliding onto the bed beside her, the blankets and their clothes between them. But pleasure wasn’t the goal. Didn’t even cross their minds. He wrapped an arm around her, pressing his face against her throat, kissing her pulse. She purred low in her chest at his closeness, petting her fingers through his hair. Having his arms around her like that made her feel... safe. Safe in a way she hadn’t felt before.

“Lass, I’ve spoken with Haskill.” He muttered against her skin. “When they Greymarch comes, if your idea doesn’t work, I’ve ordered him to take you back to Nirm until it’s over.”

“Sheo—”

“Lass. Please. You can try whatever plan you have, but if it doesn’t work, I want you to promise me you’ll leave. I’ll send Haskill for you once it’s safe again.”

After a moment, she kissed his temple. “I promise. Now... I think the two of us could use some sleep.”

“Agreed.”

She paused a moment, and smirked, closing her eyes. "I'm starting to think we're more than just friends."

He mustered a smile at this, relaxing against her. "I'm starting to think I like that idea."

The Twinblade

“It took a lot of work, but the stones are set.” Dumag sighed, removing the sheet from the blade resting on his shop’s counter. “Take a look.”

“Oh, this is perfect.” Kiahni leaned over it, examining how the Madness Crystal sat opposite of the Order Crystal. “I hope it works... I only get one shot at this.”

“At what?”

She arched a brow at him, and sheathed the blade. “Dumag, I ask that you keep all of this to yourself. Much as Cutter has. No one must know. Not even Sheogorath himself, if I am to save this realm.”

While he seemed confused, he nodded. “Yes, Champion.”

Sword at her hip, she departed, sighing heavily. It was sunny out. Glaringly sunny, and warm. In her time here, Kiahni recognized it for what it was. Rain meant a good mood. Joyous, even. Sheogorath liked the rain. It always gave him a whimsical sort of air. But days like today... All was not well, despite appearances.

The mage pouted, but made her way towards the gates, back to her workspace outside New Sheoth. Kiahni only paused at the city gates, turning to peer about behind her, when she got the feeling that she was being watched. There was no one there, of course, the mage’s shoulders slumping. Wordlessly, she turned away and continued along the road. She didn’t like keeping things from Sheogorath... but she could see the change. There was no way to explain it, the brief periods of lucidity that were steadily becoming less fleeting. He would watch her with an unreadable expression, and there were far fewer outbursts and interruptions than she had become accustomed to. His expression was often blank, his gaze cold... even clinical.

Kiahni didn’t need Haskill to tell her what it was.

The Greymarch was coming, and it scared her. The Champion’s hand came up to the pendant resting round her neck, worry creeping over her. If she didn’t succeed, and she came back after the dust had settled, would he remember her? Would he be angry and cast her away? Would he even come back, if Jyggalag had a grasp of their plans? Did her presence ensure the death, or destruction, of Sheogorath?

The thought hurt her chest, and after clutching the pendant for a few moments, she resolved to go through with her plan. If it meant saving him, she could deal with a loss of memory. Of him. She simply didn’t want to lose him entirely.

Alone in her study, Kiahni moved to the area she had designated for summoning, and produced a scroll of Summon Hunger. Haskill had remarked this was Sheogorath’s favored daedra, besides Golden Saints and Dark Seducers. She only hoped it worked as well as she thought it would. She drew her sword, and the Hunger tilted its head, not fully understanding her intent.

“I’m sorry if this hurts...” She muttered before giving it a command. “Stand still.”

It did so.

Without warning, she plunged Twinfang into its chest. The Hunger shrieked and swiped its claws at her, struggling. The mage charged the blade’s handles with energy, wisps of magicka coming off her

forearms in fine plumes. There came a clack, and she pulled either sword in opposing directions.

A blinding light filled the room with a clap of thunder. When Kiahni managed to squint her eyes open, they soon widened when she saw an Auriel and a Mazken in opposite sides of the room, struggling and stumbling to their feet. Both of them looked shocked, gaping at her. Coincidentally, both were men. The Auriel was taller, with broader shoulders and more defined muscles, akin to a warrior. The Mazken looked more slender and lithe, such as a rogue or ranger.

“How did you...?! What have you...?!” The Auriel sputtered, staring at her in shock.

“It works...” Kiahni peered down at the blades in her hands. “It works! Hah!”

“What are you talking about? What’s going on?!” The Mazken questioned, seeming worried.

“I can’t tell you what I’ve just accomplished. I can’t risk that.” Kiahni clicked the blades back together before hugging either Daedra. “But I just solved two problems with one solution! Here, follow me back to the city.”

The more she tested it, the more convinced she was that it would work. And the more days passed, the more she saw Sheogorath slipping away. There was a lack of cheer. A coldness crept into his gaze, as well as a silvery tint steadily overtaking golden eyes. She worried she was running out of time.

Kiahni was all nerves as she continued transcribing her notes. She had to set her quill down and flex her hands. The idea of stabbing a daedra was one thing. Stabbing a daedric prince was another. It frightened her. Not because she would die – because honestly speaking, she expected death in any given fashion, as a mage – but because he would smite her, turn back, and... find her corpse.

Some part of her wondered if daedra could grieve. They were immortal. Ever reborn and recycled. Not finite, like mortals. Would he be able to process that? Kiahni then scoffed to herself. Sheogorath was mad, not stupid.

Sneering, she slammed her ledger shut and shoved it off the desk before dragging her hands down her face. The door opened. She turned in her chair, and she froze, seeing it was Sheogorath. Some part of her hoped it was him. Surely the prince of order would knock? But she was still uneasy.

“I wanted to see you, lass.” His voice had that telltale lilt.

Kiahni’s shoulders sagged, a breath leaving her. She stood, striding over to him and sliding into his space, where he embraced her. “I’m scared.”

“I know.” A hand rubbed across her shoulders before he pulled back. “You’d be crazy not to be!”

The small, broken laugh that left her was muffled by his chest. After a moment, she pulled back, gazing up at him. “Was... Was there something you needed?”

“Yes. To see you. Like I said. Y’know I hate repeatin m’self!” It lacked any sense of bite. “Maybe we could stroll in the gardens?”

Part of her wanted to protest, but she didn’t. Couldn’t bring herself to. She couldn’t imagine knowing what was about to happen, as he did. Was it like being told one had vampirism, or a wasting disease? An inevitable end? Was he as scared as she was?

So, she went. They walked through the glowing fungus hall and the kelp gardens. The latter was her favorite, like looking at a kelp forest without actually being underwater, towers of silky red leaves flowing and rippling. They had tea there, and she saw betta fish swimming through air with delicate flutters of their billowing fins. Those were new.

“I made them last night! Couldn’t sleep.” Sheogorath remarked as if hearing her wonder. “They only each cheese. Eidar cheese!”

“Better them than me. I can’t stand moldy cheese.” Kiahni remarked absently.

And he laughed. A good, hardy laugh before he cast her a grin. It was brief, before his expression faded and his gaze grew distant. His eyes were silver enough that blue clung to the edges of his irises. Once serpentine pupils were now almost completely round. He jumped when she laid her hand over his, and he grinned at her, like she had just banished some unseen demon. Maybe, in retrospect, she had, for him.

“We’re gonna have so much fun once this mess is over.” His tone was bittersweet and he patted her hand with a sigh, his own hand much larger than hers.

“I’ll solve this. I promise.” Kiahni told him, trying to sound firm, but her voice shook.

“Oh, I’ve no doubt you’ll get it eventually. But, even if you don’t this time around, think about it! Haskill could bring you back in time to have you help me rebuild.”

“You won’t have to. Not this time.”

All he managed was a smile.

She smiled back.

As soon as tea-time was over, she went straight back to work, grabbing her ledger and finishing her notes. There was no time to waste.

A New Dawn

Chapter Summary

Mild mentions of violence but nothing explicit.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Her ears were ringing. There was a bright light in her eyes, and her head hurt worse than that time she had been kicked by a horse. She was lying... on her back. It took her a long moment to register that she was facing up and not down.

Someone was shouting. She felt numb and cold all over, save for liquid warmth dribbling down her right leg. Then, a shadow loomed over her. Hands so warm they felt burning cupped her face.

The forces around them had stopped fighting. Jyggalag watched as Sheogorath knelt over the mortal. He shouted orders to his troops, some coming over to bind the horrid wound in her right thigh where bone protruded from meat. She was already in shock, staring up at the Madgod with glassy eyes and pale lips.

She was a fool. Attacking a god was the dumbest thing a mortal could do. Yet, she had challenged him, a mix of Auriel and Mazken armor over her robes and her twinblade in hand. Sheogorath stood only the height of an altmer, seven-foot-two, thus only two feet over her. Jyggalag towered over her like a monolith, twelve feet tall. Yet, her fear had been tempered with determination. She had leapt at him, and stabbed him square in the chest before separating her blade. He wasn't certain if the explosion had flung her, or if he had hit her out of reflex, but she had been sent sailing through the air and tumbled to the edge of the courtyard.

Sheogorath's burning gold gaze whipped around to his other half. "GET OVER HERE AND HELP!"

The mage whimpered at the sound of thunder, and the much bigger shadow now looming over her. There was a pressure in her leg. Someone was talking to her. Talking at her. Petting her hair and nuzzling her temple, warm breath caressing her ear. Her leg was turned and... pulled? There was an ache. More liquid warmth slithering over her skin to pool under her. Her eyes fluttered. She was making a mess of whatever floor she was laying on. Or... was that carpet? Or grass?

Haskill watched, brows furrowed and very real concern on his features. Jyggalag had set the bone and now rested his hand over the wound, the appendage easily encircling the mage's thigh. Sheogorath rested his hand over the larger's, still murmuring to Kiahni in Daedric. Of course, only the power of a Daedric Prince could save her, now. Bone cracked as her femur healed, and there was a gurgle of blood as flesh knit together.

She murmured something incoherent. Her hand reached out, claws meeting something soft. Silk? Something warm pressed to her brow. At the last minute, she registered the something was chapped lips.

The first thing to come back was scent. She caught a familiar aroma, but slightly different than she was used to. Sandalwood and ginger. The earthy tones were lost, replaced with something like leather, and that ever-present hint of cologne remained.

Silk, fleece, plush, and furs surrounded her, her shoulders and head supported by downy pillows, matching the comforter pulled over her. She recognized it with ease, and after a moment, she managed to sit up and peer about. The royal bedchambers were empty. Dread seeped into her, mind racing. Had it not worked? Had she killed him? Had she ascended? The thought alone made tears creep down her face.

One of the fungal doors sounded. Her head turned in time to see Sheogorath. Or... she hoped it was him. She prayed it was him.

“Lass! Lass—” He strode briskly over to her, plopping to sit down beside her and cupping her face, brushing her tears away with his thumbs. “Lass, it’s okay. It’s alright. Yer safe, now.”

Wide azure eyes searched his features. They were once again full of life, his eyes the color of molten gold flecked with copper and tarnished brass. All she managed was a smile. A goofy, lopsided grin.

Sheogorath smiled back, resting his brow against hers. “As much as I love that smile... are you with me, lass?”

“Y-Yeah.” Kiahni nodded meekly, hands resting on his wrists. “Please tell me it worked.”

“It worked. And I’m not sayin because you asked. Your idea worked, lass. D’ya have any idea what that means?”

“That I spat in the eye of your fellow daedra?”

“Yes. You did.” His grin grew sharper. “You’ve made history, lass.”

She shifted, trying to scoot closer and hug him, only to fall still with a grimace.

“Lass?”

“My leg hurts.”

He pouted, then. Like a child. “It should, after what happened. Some magicky babble about the explosion from pullin us apart aside, the explosion sent you flyin.”

Worried, she pushed the blanket aside. There was no sign of permanent damage. Only a long scar that wrapped around the outer side of her right thigh.

“I’ll spare you the gory details.” He sighed, voice quiet. “Elaine said you might end up with a permanent limp on that side.”

After a moment of staring, she decided she didn’t care, forcing a smile as she looked up at him. “Y’know... I always wanted a sword-cane.”

“Then I’ll make you the prettiest damn cane to ever exist.” Sheogorath chuckled, nuzzling her temple. “In the meantime, you could do with somethin to eat n’ drink, I imagine. And some rest. A little tea-party in bed?”

“That sounds lovely, Sheo.”

Kiahni, a mortal khajiit mage, had singlehandedly undone the most powerful daedric curse of all time. It was an act that defied nature and reason itself. She had mended the Madgod's cane, set it in the throne, appointed herself regent, and had pulled apart the two sides of the coin.

The citizens of the realm lucid enough to understand it were ecstatic and relieved. Offices were appointed. Ma'zaddha was made Duke of Dementia, and Drengak gro-Barrum named Duke of Mania. The highest honor was reserved for Kiahni, whom was named royal arcane advisor – a position never held by anyone before.

At the ceremony before the grand feast, a week after the battle when she was up and walking again, she was presented with her cane. A Daedric artifact that looked to be made of black, dense wood that faded white at the tip, and had a handle of polished, golden mithril. The base of the handle, near the cane's hilt, resembled a conventional cane, but then extended up to mimic the handle of a rapier. Inset in it were gems of amethyst and moonstone. It was, in her opinion, indeed the prettiest cane to ever exist, haunting and awesome in its beauty. The Daedric script on the handle simply read "Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious." It made her smile, despite sounding ridiculous.

The unexpected guest arrived after dinner, during the wine and dancing. Sheogorath ordered his troops to stand down as Jyggalag strode into the grand hall. To everyone's surprise, he knelt when he reached the dais, tenderly taking one of Kiahni's hands in his own. Stunned, the entire court fell silent, watching. Sheogorath's hand tightened on his own cane.

"You have done me... us... a great service, Kiahni." Jyggalag peered at her, silver eyes glinting beneath a full helm. "I wanted to thank you personally."

She didn't know how to respond, staring at him.

"In return, no attacks will be carried out against this realm." He released her hand and stood, looking to Sheogorath. "I would live in peace, now... brother."

The Madgod gave him a scrutinizing look before extending a hand in acceptance, the pair shaking. "You missed dinner, ya barmy git."

"I had a realm to reclaim. Mora turned it into an auxiliary library."

"The nerve! Well, at least stay for a drink."

Jyggalag reached up and removed his helmet. "If you insist."

Chapter End Notes

AN: Kiahni's cane looks like the one from
(<https://i.pinimg.com/originals/ce/6f/5b/ce6f5b88f05209b0c534480889bbd93a.jpg>)

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